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ABSTRACT

A study investigated the studying and reading processes of limited-English-speaking Hmong university students, using think-aloud protocols, reading journals, and study skills portfolios. Think-alouds were conducted in four areas: reading a content-area textbook chapter; taking lecture notes; test studying strategies; and test-taking strategies. Reading journal entries focused on student perceptions of the reading strategies they used to increase reading rate and improve comprehension. In the portfolios, the students gathered essays in which they identified their initial learning strategies and reported results of direct application of alternative strategies. Strategies included those for reading textbooks, taking lecture notes, time management, test studying, and test taking. It was found that students memorized formulas in mathematics and vocabulary words from textbook glossaries, parroted text in answer to questions, and re-read material repeatedly until they understood it, often hesitating over vocabulary not identical to textbook wording. In note-taking, students made no margin notes or annotations, focusing on understanding the lecturer. Study was generally done alone, and language problems were frequently a barrier in test-taking. Information drawn from these sources provided the teacher with valuable information with which to personalize study strategies to be taught. (MSE)

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Using "Think Alouds," Journals, and Portfolios to Assess Hmong Students' Perceptions of Their Study/Learning Strategies

Gretchen Starks-Martin

Many English as a Second Language students who enter an American university are unprepared for the rigors of reading expository text, or of taking notes from large lecture classes. Research has shown that they sometimes resort to rote memorization or a "copying everything down" strategy for studying and note-taking, which hampers an in-depth understanding of the content material (Benson, 1989; Adamson, 1990).

From 1994-1995, information was gathered regarding study/learning strategies from a group of Hmong students who utilized the services of an Academic Learning Center in a four-year state university. Initially, an informal assessment called a "think aloud" was conducted with three Hmong students who accessed peer tutoring services. Reading journals and portfolios essays from another four Hmong students enrolled in a reading and study skills course provided additional data. As a form of triangulation (Davis, 1995), information from the journals and portfolios affirmed the perceptions revealed in the oral "think alouds."

Description of "Think Alouds"

In a "think aloud" students are asked to give verbal self-reports, which can include the re-telling of a story or the description of thinking processes during reading or writing. Sometimes referred to as "read alouds," or "talk throughs," they are often utilized with elementary and middle school students to assess reading comprehension (Valeri-Gold & Olson, 1991; Marie & Hathaway, 1993; Gillet & Temple, 1994, p. 144-145; Simpson, 1995). "Think-aloud" oral protocols have been shown to have merit: "The teacher who listens to a student think aloud while reading gains insights not available from traditional reading lessons" (Barnett, 1989, p. 157). Students also develop an awareness of their own personal learning processes which helps them "improve listening skills, foster positive attitudes, encourage imagination, and develop reading maturity" (Valeri-Gold & Olson, 1991, p. 88).

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In this case, "think alouds" were conducted with Hmong university students to ascertain their perceptions of how they constructed meaning from textbook and lecture material. In one-on-one interviews, students were asked open-ended questions about how they studied, what academic problems they encountered, how they read textbook chapters, and how they took notes. The conversations were not taped at their request. Probes such as "Tell me more about that," or "Why do you think that?" were given to expand on the initial responses. "Think alouds" were conducted in four areas:

1. A think-aloud on reading a content area textbook chapter;
2. A think-aloud on the process of taking lecture notes;
3. A think-aloud on test studying strategies; and
4. A think-aloud on test-taking strategies.

Based on these informal assessments, insights were gained about the study-reading processing of these students. How they learned the English language, how they approached tests, textbooks, and lecture, and how they participated in the classroom were recorded from their conversations. In addition, examples of lecture notes and answers to objective test questions were analyzed in order to gather more data on their information processing.

Description of Reading Journals and Study Skills Portfolios

Written protocols such as journals are valuable because they reveal perceptions precisely and can also "highlight important syntax, vocabulary, or cultural information..." (Barnett, 1989, p. 159). In the reading and study skills course, reading journals were kept where Hmong students wrote about their perceptions of the reading strategies they used to increase reading rate and improve reading comprehension.

Portfolios are a "purposeful collection of student work that tells a story of the student's efforts, progress, or achievement...." (Paulson, Paulson, & Meyer, 1991). For their portfolios, Hmong students first identified learning strategies they currently used and then were taught alternative strategies. The instruction was similar to that described in Kasper, consisting of "direct explanation, guided practice, independent application, and group feedback" (1995, p. 301).

Follow-up portfolio assignments consisted of written essays on the initial learning or study strategy, and the results of direct application of the new study strategy. Topics included strategies for reading textbooks, taking lecture notes, time management, test studying, and test-taking.

These written journals and portfolio essays encouraged self-knowledge and awareness of metacognitive strategies to assist these students in improving their learning (Smolen, Newman, Wathen, & Lee, 1995). Students reflected on their learning processes and their reactions were valuable in choosing which new study strategy to teach (Gottleib, 1995).

Learning the English Language

How these students learned the English language assisted in analyzing their approach to college studying. All came to the United States from refugee camps in Thailand. English was learned in the camps by repeating patterns orally and then writing these patterns over and over again. The patterns were subsequently memorized. According to Bliatout (1988), most books which are used to teach reading in the Hmong language are based on strategies of memorization, recitation, dictation, and sight vocabulary (Bliatout, Downing, Lewis, & Yang, 1988, p. 87) These same strategies were used in the refugee camps to teach English.

In the United States, English grammar and writing were learned in special ESL classes. Various ESL methods were used, but recitation and memorization of words were also common instructional techniques. The theme of repeating information and rote memorization was evident in their perceptions of the learning strategies which they practiced in college.

Student Perceptions

The "think alouds" provided valuable information from which to personalize study strategies to assist these Hmong students. This information was shared with peer tutors so that they could incorporate study skills in their tutoring. The journals and portfolios from the course revealed similar perceptions of their learning strategies.

1. Textbook Reading Strategies

Students indicated from the "think alouds" that they memorized formulas in math and vocabulary words from the glossaries of their textbooks. They answered questions at the end of

chapters by parroting the exact wording in the textbook. They took notes from chapters, utilizing the exact words from boldface headings. One student indicated, "I go through the chapter paragraph by paragraph and use a dictionary. It takes me over three hours to read and take notes from a typical chapter."

Journal and portfolio entries revealed that students often re-read material again and again until they understood it. They tried to make predictions, but often the language was too difficult and they had to stop the comprehension flow to look up words in the dictionary.

Because the students memorized information, they often had difficulty when exact words were not used on test questions or when exact prototypes of problems were not used in mathematics exams. Unless the example or situation was stated verbatim from the book, the application of material was often difficult.

Study Strategies: Previewing or surveying a textbook chapter was modeled and students were asked to preview orally so that the instructor or tutor could check their mastery of this strategy. They were shown how to map concepts from their textbook pages and were then asked to make their own map of a textbook chapter section, asking questions if needed (King, Fagan, Bratt, & Baer, 1987, p. 110-112). Students were shown examples of vocabulary flashcards and asked to construct some for use in their difficult course(s).

A KWL was modeled on a textbook chapter as a study/reading strategy to encourage the students to put ideas in their own words:

K = What do you know about the chapter? (brainstorming)

W = What do you **want** to know about the chapter? (predicting questions)

L = What did you learn from the chapter? (summarizing after reading)

(from Gillet & Temple, 1994, p. 287)

2. Lecture Note-taking Strategies

An analysis of lecture notes of all of the students revealed that they had difficulty getting down all of the ideas and they made no notes in the margins regarding key terms or ideas. There were no annotations or markings on the notes, one student commenting "I had just enough time to

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copy down what the professor said." Another student wrote in her journal, "I never like professor giving out lecture. It's really hard for me to jot down what he is saying, unless he is writing down on the board and explain it." They did not ask questions in class and did not ask instructors to clarify concepts which they did not understand. One student admitted, "I do not ask questions in class because much of it would be a silly one about vocabulary. And what if the instructor gives me another example that I don't understand either?"

Study Strategies: Mapping of lecture notes was demonstrated, as in textbook reading. In this way, students could get a visual representation of the lecture. They organized concepts into topics and subtopics and then added supporting details (Gillet & Temple, 1994, p. 280).

Questions were predicted from lecture. Students orally discussed the lecture and then predicted questions for a test. Their predictions were checked after taking the test (King, 1992; Gillet & Temple, 1994, p. 223). Students were encouraged to compare their notes with a "buddy" and asked to talk to an American student near them in the class. One student already had an American study partner and wrote that it helped immensely in comparing lecture notes and studying for exams.

Cooperative learning with a partner was an integral part of the coursework for the study skills class. This was helpful, because as one student wrote in a journal, "I think it would be helpful if I have more conversation with American students, but the problem is who would be willing to talk to me." Another student wrote in his portfolio, "Group work really helps, because if one doesn't understand, the other partner might know it."

3. Test-studying Strategies

With the exception of one student, the others studied alone. In general, notes and formulas were memorized. Answers to questions in the back of the chapters were memorized. This made it difficult to apply concepts and learn information unless the exam questions were stated word-for-word from the textbook.

Study Strategies: Students were encouraged to use mapping, flashcards, and to find a "study buddy." Students were shown examples of flashcards and requested to construct them for

test-studying. A peer tutor assisted one student in these strategies and improvement on tests immediately resulted. Hmong students benefited from working with American students as "study partners." It helped them learn vocabulary and predict test questions. It also assisted in learning idioms, slang, and acronyms.

4. Test-taking Strategies

A "think aloud" of comprehension monitoring on tests and quizzes revealed that questions were missed because vocabulary words were misunderstood and no clarification was requested of the instructor. There was no problem with direct definitions since students had memorized them. However, multiple choice questions with unusual constructs such as double negatives were often confusing to the students. Idioms, slang, and acronyms sometimes led to misinterpretation.

Portfolio essays revealed that students knew much of the information, but were unable to apply it if there were unusual question constructs, if applications called for something different than the prototype in the textbook, or if vocabulary words were not understood. An example was a test question which was missed because the student did not know the meaning of "auspices."

Study Strategies: Students were encouraged to approach the instructor during the test for vocabulary clarification and to discuss misunderstood information during an office hour or after class. This was practiced through role playing of typical dialogues with instructors.

Test questions missed were analyzed for testwiseness clues such as the comprehension of double negatives or multiple choice questions which used "not" or "except." Students were given practice in writing essay questions.

Summary:

Students' main learning strategy was memorization, similar to their second language teaching methods. They memorized formulas, answers to questions from the back of textbook chapters, and vocabulary words from the glossaries of books. They were meticulous about taking notes from textbooks and re-copying lecture notes, often word-for-word.

Students were perfectionists and studied long hours. Education is a strong value in their community (Yang & Murphy, 1993) and these students were motivated to meet parents'

expectations. One student noted in his portfolio after assessing his time management schedule, "I need some time to play a little more, so as to get rid of stress. Studying too much [I] cannot concentrate on studies."

In the classroom they were quiet, and seldom (if ever) asked questions or probed for clarification of concepts or vocabulary. They were hesitant to speak with the professor after class or during office hours.

The study strategies taught attempted to change this behavior. Tutors worked with students individually; instructors utilized group work in a classroom setting. After completing the class, one Hmong student wrote in his portfolio, "My improvement in this course [study strategies course] is improving my economics class. I've learned to study step by step, take very good notes on lecture, and read the book carefully, using an outline to prepare for exams. I try to answer questions at the end of each chapter and write them in the form of an essay in my own words."

Conclusion

Using "think alouds," journals, and portfolios as assessments of Hmong students' learning strategies not only helped tutors and instructors determine the best study strategies to teach the students, but also helped the students themselves develop an awareness of their own needs and processes so that they could practice more effective methods of studying. With the assistance from their tutors and instructors, these Hmong students began to predict exam questions from lecture, compare notes with others, and pinpoint important vocabulary.

Many ESL students are not prepared for the learning environments in colleges and universities. They need assistance in "relating kinds of lecture information, finding definitions in context, and improving short-term memory" (Peterson, 1989, p. 210) since they often have a limited number of strategies for taking lecture notes and reading expository textbooks. Using "think alouds," journals and portfolios to assess perceptions of the learning strategies of Hmong students assisted in determining which study strategies were beneficial and applicable for them. Tutors in the Academic Learning Center and instructors in the reading and study skills course could then provide guided instruction in strategies to assist their learning.

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MAJOR AIR POLLUTANTS & EFFECTS

MAJOR POLLUTANTS

(2a) Suspended particulate matter (spm)
- (2) mixture of solide particles and aerosols

(2b) Volatile organic compounds (VOC)
- (2) Gas, paint, cleaning solution, etc

(3) Carbon monoxide (CO)
- (3) invisible gas, poison for air breathing animals

(4) Nitrogen Oxides

(5a) Sulfer Oxides, SO_x
- (5) poisonous to plants and animals

(6a) Lead and other heavy metals
- (6) causes brain damage and breath

(7) Ozone and Photochemical Oxidants
- (7) Toxic to plants and animals

(8) Air toxic and radon
- (8) carcinogenic chemicals, radioactive materials

Mixture of Pollutants = Adverse EFFECTS

(9) EFFECTS of POLLUTANTS

(9) EFFECTS on human heart
- (9a) Chronic impact
- (9b) Acute health Hazard
- (9c) Carcinogenic health hazard
  - Cigarettes (9c)
  - Lead poisoning (9c)

(9) EFFECTS on Agriculture and Forest
- (9d) crop damage due to ozone
- (9e) Acid deposition destroy forest

(9) Effects on Materials & Aesthetics
- (9f) Ozone oxidation of car tires
- (9g) Sulfer dioxide corrosion of metals